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CIA ties with academics: Dangerous implications

By Rene Becker

The final report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities renders many startling revelations about the operations of U.S. intelligence agencies.

In one brief passage, the committee reports: *the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is now using several hundred American academics, who in addition to providing leads and sometimes making introductions for intelligence purposes, occasionally write books and other material to be used for propaganda purposes abroad.*

These academics are located in over 100 American colleges, universities, and other related institutes. At the majority of institutions, no one other than the individual academic concerned is aware of the CIA link.

The above paragraphs appear in a subsection entitled "Covert Use of the U.S. Academic Community." The section, heavily censored by the CIA, takes up only one of several thousand pages in the final report of the Select Committee.

DOCUMENTS RECENTLY released by the CIA indicate that this University is among many where the CIA is using academics. Some of the professors, administrators or graduate students who have CIA ties are fully aware of the extent of their involvement. Others believe they are cooperating with the Agency out of patriotism or civic duty and are unaware of the implications of their connection with the CIA.

Whatever the nature of these relationships with the CIA, either paid or unpaid, witting or unwitting, they have far-reaching effects on everyone within the academic world.

For example, the recently released CIA documents concerning the University show that some professors were filling "Agency request" for employees or helped the Agency in "spotting candidates" for recruitment.

WHEN THE CIA asks a professor to "spot" a candidate, the Agency is actually asking the professor to set up a student for an intensive secret investigation.

Gary Weissman was a student at the University of Wisconsin in the late 1950s. He served as president of the Wisconsin Student Association in 1959 and, after graduation, was mildly active in the anti-war movement.

Weissman learned recently that he was the subject of a five-year CIA investigation to determine his eligibility for the Agency's clandestine service. The CIA considered using Weissman as a covert CIA agent at the Seventh World Youth Festival in Vienna in 1959.

THE MOST NOTEWORTHY aspect of this investigation is the fact that Weissman never applied for CIA employment and was not aware that he was being investigated. Weissman was never contacted by the Agency.

Weissman learned of the CIA's interest in him through documents received as a result of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Although the CIA has forked over 44 documents concerning Weissman it is still withholding 26 additional reports. Weissman is pressing a lawsuit against the CIA to affect the disclosure of the remaining documents which the Agency has refused to release on the basis of "national security."

Just like countless others, Weissman was "spotted" by an Agency contact on the University of Wisconsin campus. The contact gave the name of a student to the CIA, without the student's knowledge, then the CIA investigated the student's past and followed the student or as long as two or three years.

AFTER EXTENSIVE files were created on the student and after his movements had been recorded and analyzed by Agency personnel, a decision would be finally made by the CIA to approach the student or move on to someone else.

But recruiting agents for either the research or clandestine offices of the CIA is only one aspect of the Agency's relationship with academics.

The CIA documents which have been released to both this University and the University of California (all of which show that the Agency was very open and helpful to a small, privileged group of scholars.

THESE SCHOLARS received among other things reference materials usually concerning China or the USSR from the government and perhaps the world's best intelligence source.

The CIA also held closed seminars where a few select scholars were invited to discuss international relations with Agency analysts and other top government officials. The groups were generally not larger than 15 including Agency personnel. But if the CIA is the world's leading intelligence organization questions arise about who benefitted most from these seminars.

In a May 9, 1974 memorandum, VIA Coordinator for Academic Relations Harold Ford wrote that these seminars profitted the Agency immensely. He wrote that the Agency also picked up some new perspectives on "key questions of U.S.-Soviet detente, and of the interplay of Soviet-Chinese-U.S. relationships."

BUT FORD also described in length the third benefit the CIA derived from the seminars. He summarized by writing that "these outings depend on friendships with existing contacts and expanded friendships to additional professors whom we had not previously met."

Several professors who have admitted to attending these seminars, have said they were invaluable learning experiences. These professors, who attended the seminars also received the CIA reference materials which, although not officially classified, were not available to all scholars.

These professors interviewed, who said they received CIA reference materials were surprised to learn they were part of a small group of American scholars—no more than 100—earmarked for CIA benefits.

How the CIA selected scholars for seminars or for other research benefits is not clear from the documents received thus far. But it is generally believed that those scholars who cooperated with the Agency in other respects—spotting candidates, writing propaganda, spying for the Agency on trips abroad, and making introductions for intelligence purposes—were held in the Agency's favor.

One professor who although approached by the CIA but did not cooperate, expressed concern about the Agency's influence on academic competition and the genuine search for truth in the scholarly world.

The professor said those few scholars who are cooperating with the CIA have an unfair advantage over those who don't. Once privy to such information the scholar would think twice before doing anything which might stop the flow from the Agency, they said.

AN INTERESTING note about the seminars—most of the CIA seminars were held between 1967 and 1973. Precisely between those years the CIA ran PROJECT RESISTANCE—a counterintelligence program during the most violent anti-war years on college campuses.

Through documents released just three weeks ago to the Campaign to Stop Government Spying, a coalition of more than 80 religious and social interest groups, it is now known that the Agency used its campus contacts to spy on the student population—specifically those issuing opposition to government foreign policy, or the Vietnam War.

This Monday the Faculty Senate will begin to address the issue of guidelines for relationships between academics and intelligence agencies. Although many have charged that such guidelines are an infringement on a professor's academic freedom it would be naive to ignore not only student's academic freedom but the right of all Americans to privacy and life without fear of government repression for political thoughts.

The Faculty Senate should be aware of the warning from the Senate Select Committee before deciding on guidelines with respect to intelligence agencies.

The Committee is concerned, however, that American academics involved in such activities may undermine public confidence that those who train our youth are upholding the ideals, independence and integrity of American universities.